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Hamburger Bahnhof

Martin Honert goes on a crusade for the young of body and mind at the

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Martin Honert Goes on a Crusade for the Young of Body and Mind at the Hamburger Bahnhof



At stake in **Martin Honert's** "[Kinderkreuzzug](#)" — on view at Berlin's **Hamburgerbahnhof** through April 7, 2013 — is not only a reclamation and lauding of childhood fantasies, pleasures, and memories, but also but also a documentation of a first generation of childhoods whose fantasies were molded in plastic and traveled at the speed of a jet engine. Escaping one's manifest, material reality was also a material shift into brittle polystyrenes whose hollow cling differed so profoundly from the wooden clunk of the past, but whose abundance let so many more fantasies enter the imagination and sandbox to break and be replaced by new ones.

The work after which the exhibition is named, made from 1985-87, just after the artist's graduation from the **Kunstakademie Dusseldorf**, sees two crusading knights with boyish features despite their adult size, followed by a hoard of peasants and fellow crusaders which become progressively flattened into a two-dimensional image on the wall. One could imagine a world of childhood possibility in which this pair guards against parental decrees. Yet, the still-visible seam left by the plastic's mold disrupts their otherwise meticulously painted surface, recalling their miniature imperfect forms in childhood use and their process of production in adult analyses.

Just behind this initial fantasy stands "Ein Szenisches Modell des Fliegenden Klassenzimmers" (1995) which earned Honert the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale of the same year. The work references the eponymous children's book and television program, which took the new worldly possibilities of the second half of the 20 century to the classroom, envisioning a fantasy in which students studying pyramids were transported instantaneously to the Egypt of the Pharaohs. It was one of the first instances in which education became an experiential rather than dictatorial practice. In Honert's iteration, the figures are flattened, as if realizing what might be a childhood assumption that there really were people in that wooden television box, squeezed between two panes of glass.



These narratives are not Honert's. He is vastly more simplistic in his descriptions of the various impulses that led to each of the works on view's creation, which are compiled within a sub-catalogue for the exhibition distributed at its entrance. That Honert feels the compulsion to justify the origins of his works through language has more than a purely empirical consequence, however.

On one level, the linguistic justification is a perhaps unintentionally a nod to the 20 century modulation of the cogito, "I think, *I speak*, therefore I am," in which the subject's possession of language — the ability to formulate and communicate thoughts and memories seen through an empirical lens as electrical impulses and chemical reactions — predicating existence. For these sculpturally bound recollections to be Honert's *he* has to place them within constructs. It can be done neither by this critic, nor even a fictitious twin with identical experiences. Honert must give them consequence.

Alternatively, Honert's impulse to qualify could be viewed from a psychoanalytic angle; these texts fall neatly into the category of secondary revision. This is most accessibly applied to the early works on view at the Hamburgerbahnhof. For example, "Tisch mit Wackel-pudding, Roter Polsterstuhl (Table with Jell-O, Red Upholstered Chair)" (1983). According to the artist's text, the work attempts to come to terms with the time he spent in boarding school. The turn of phrase used, "coming to terms with," (in denen ich mich mit meiner Schulzeit in einem Internat in Ostwestfalen auseinandergesetzt hatte) suggests a certain level of trauma or feeling of alienation. However, the description of the work's glowing red polystyrene

chair and standard issue laminate top kitchen table that shakes every so often with considerable racket to make the otherwise solid emerald Jell-O wiggle is almost exclusively technical. By this removal of emotional content to the level of process, Honert can perhaps overlook the works fraught personal implications in exchange for a conversation about late-60s kitsch.

Indeed, there might be a third, more directly artworld-related cause of Honert's reluctance to leave a reading up to critics and observers. He came of age in an artistic environment entirely invested in questions of concept, minimalism, and the political. Throughout his career he has given wide berth to such themes and tendencies in the art world at large, with the work's explicitly childish naïveté implicitly confronting these tendencies. While suggesting a deeper intent behind his face-value enjoyable works may only go to exemplify our remaining mired in such conventions, despite post-modernism's refutation of some of conceptual art's more redemptive aspect. It may also help situate Honert's work in a schema beyond our simultaneous entrenchment in artistic intent, such that it survives in collective memory long after the Fliegenden Klassenzimmer has hit a memorial dead end.